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# First-Hand Information From The War Zone"

ADDRESS BY

W. A. GARRETT

OF THE

U. S. Railroad Commission to France

DELIVERED TO THE

## "Four Minute Men"

OF THE

Pennsylvania

Committee of Public Safety

and Liberty Loan Speakers

UNION LEAGUE, PHILADELPHIA

October 15, 1917

*Issued by Pennsylvania Department of Commerce and Public Safety  
at Pennsylvania State Penn Square, Philadelphia*

## "First-Hand Information From The War Zone"

The following address by W. A. Garrett, of the U. S. Railroad Commission to France, was delivered at a meeting of the Four Minute Men, of the Pennsylvania Committee of Public Safety, and Liberty Loan Speakers, on October 15, 1917, in the Union League, Philadelphia. Mr. Garrett was introduced after the meeting had been stirred by Ex-Governor Edwin S. Stuart, Edward T. Stotesbury, George Wharton Pepper and Colonel John Gribbel, president of the Union League, who strongly supported the Liberty Loan as a means of making America's participation in the war doubly effective.

### MR. GARRETT'S ADDRESS

"Mr. Chairman, Four Minute Men: Our Commission of four, appointed by the War Department, had orders to study the French railroad conditions, with a view to reporting on their needs in handling the American expeditionary forces that were to be sent to France. During war times, you can understand, there are certain things that cannot be mentioned, but the Department has no objection to some data being given to the American public.

"The gist of our report was that the French railroads were in as good condition as the average American railroad today; that they had to be kept in that condition, because it is just as necessary to have a first-class transportation machine as it is to have a first-class fighting machine.

"The Commission spent four days in England with the War Department's representatives, studying the British handling of their troops in France, the same programs that Americans must study for handling our troops. Sir Eric Geddes, who organized the British program, gave us valuable information and advice in regard to the errors that they had made. Sir Eric said that he was very glad to do this, because of his regard for America, as the first railroad experience he ever had was as a freight train brakeman on the Baltimore and Ohio railroad, at Wheeling, W. Va.

"The Commission crossed the Channel from Folkstone to Boulogne and, passing through Folkstone, saw the effects of the German bombardment two days previously, at which time 37 people were killed, principally women and children. When boarding the steamer at Folkstone, each officer is required to don a life preserver and keep it on until the opposite shore is reached. Two torpedo boat destroyers accompanied the ship, on either side, and when half way across, meeting the westbound fleet, the torpedo boat destroyers from England returned and those starting from France went back to France.

"We reached Boulogne just two weeks after sailing from America and this thought immediately struck home. Before sailing from America, the bill boards and placards were covered with appeals to American youth to join the

Army enlist in the Navy. That was War Program No. 1. When we reached England, the bill boards and wagons carried the appeal 'Eat less bread; economize; conserve.' War Program No. 2. In France no appeal, no bill boards; only the earnest, intelligent work of every man, woman and child, because they had suffered for three years and the Germans were occupying French soil.

"At Boulogne we had the first real impression of war, because in the morning of that day there had been an attack and the ambulances were arriving with the injured.

"Before leaving America, we had been told that it would take a week before progress was made in France, because of the slow, deliberate manner in which these people live, and their politeness to avoid undue haste. That condition, no doubt, prevailed prior to the war, but the French people are now 'doing things' with the real 'American punch.' Here was our program: At the Boulogne Hotel, call 4:45; breakfast 5:00; left in automobiles 5:15 for Paris where we arrived at 12:30 P. M., took lunch at 12:45; appeared before Ambassador Sharp at 2:00; French War Office 3:00; and the next morning at 9 o'clock had an engagement with Albert Claveille, the French Minister in charge of transportation, a most wonderful, broad minded, liberal man.

#### LABOR SHORTAGE A HANDICAP

"In examining the ports, we found that, because of the great shortage of labor, it was not possible to unload ships by night, although all kinds of labor was engaged; young boys, old men, women, crippled soldiers, and prisoners. We saw German prisoners building camp for the American soldiers, and anyone watching a body of German prisoners work is impressed with the fact that their 40 years of military training has made strong men out of them.

"From Paris we went northeast toward the British line and there the sights in the devastated country over which the Germans had retreated cannot be described. The sub-strata of eastern France is limestone and chalk, and when the big shells from both sides of the line strike the ground the bowels of the earth are thrown up, the dirt being lighter falls first, stone on top, and mile after mile nothing is seen but a quarry bed, no trees, grass or dirt, nothing but shell holes 15 or 20 feet apart, 8 to 10 feet in diameter, generally water filled and many with green scum.

"In this war zone, the aeroplanes are numerous, and when German machines are overhead, there is steady firing of shrapnel, either to cripple the machines or to make them climb higher to prevent proper observation, which requires all persons in the zone to wear the steel helmet, because the shrapnel, the size of walnuts, is a real menace. Gas masks are required so that in case of a big attack the men in the zone will be properly protected.

"Hospitals, hospitals, hospitals everywhere, with the splendid attendants, many of them heroic women. Grave-yards without number, filled to overflowing, the white cross marking the Allies and the black cross the Germans; grave yards in which men are laid away today, bombarded and blown-up tomorrow. Barbed wire by thousands of miles and destroyed trenches with the marks of bloody encounters. Cripples everywhere, crippled in arms, legs, head, body and then equally serious are the shell-shocked men, many

of them absolutely crazy, many of them deaf, and the nerves of all so shattered that the men shake all over at the least touch. When we were near the British front, some of the Canadians had been crucified by the Germans. Surely the people of this country do not realize that we are at war.

"In studying the parcel post program at Boulogne, it was found that the British, very wisely, send the kits of the men to Boulogne headquarters whenever the officers or men fail to respond to roll call within a reasonable time. The kits are kept at Boulogne for one week and then forwarded to the home folks, and on examining the records we found that one week's home shipments for officers alone totaled more than 1000.

"We saw Vimy Ridge, under bombardment; that splendid battle ground on which the Canadians gave such a wonderful account of themselves. Just north of Vimy Ridge is Lens, the Pittsburgh of France, now held by the Germans, whom the British are trying to force back. When the Germans had been pushed back a few hundred yards, everyone was pleased, but we must not overlook the fact that Lens is 150 miles from the German line.

"The British Army has approximately 115 miles of front. Let me give you this study: It is approximately 50 miles from the British Channel to the fighting line, but where the American troops must fight, it will be over 400 miles from the coast to the fighting line, so that anyone can figure that with an equal number of men and big guns, we will be required to provide eight times the transportation facilities that the British provide.

#### **TRANSPORTATION IS BIG PROBLEM**

"Now, what have the British? When we were at headquarters they had 750 British locomotives on French rails and 49,500 British freight cars on French rails and their transportation force consisted of approximately 100,000 men. In addition to the transportation men, there were approximately 200,000 laborers taking care of the unloading at the ports, the maintenance of the railroads, canals and public highways, the British protecting 3500 miles of highways. These 300,000 men—transportation and laborers—are in addition to the fighting men, so that the American people must understand that war means men plus men.

"We were invited to French headquarters at Compegne, because General Petain was anxious to tell us about transportation, Minister Claveille having explained that the battle of the Marne, handled by Joffre in the early stages, was won mostly by the transportation of men and munitions to the battle line. General Petain told us at headquarters that it was just as necessary to have a first-class transportation machine as it was to have a first-class fighting machine; that the railroads had to be kept up in good shape; that they were in that condition then, and the very moment they were permitted to get in bad shape, just that moment either side would lose the war.

"General Petain explained in detail the defence of Verdun and showed how the town had been supplied with men, food stuff and munitions by the narrow gauge road and by the turnpikes; that they put 60,000 men to build a 36 mile double track line and it took them just three months to finish the line. If they had been ten days longer, the French could not have held out and Verdun would have been lost. We were taken to Seville Fort and there, over the wrecked

parapets, we saw the ground that the Crown Prince tried to take, which resulted in the loss of 800,000 men.

"Each German regiment has what is called a 'hellish squad', whose duty it is to poison wells, attach electric batteries to all movable articles so that as the Germans retreat and the Allies pick up a chair or open a door there is a bomb-explosion and generally a loss of life. Germany's thoroughness is emphasized in the devastated country through which they retreat—no building left standing, trees deliberately cut and destroyed. A good cousin of mine who has lived in France for more than 20 years told me that she saw 32 Belgian children with one or both hands missing after they reached Paris, and a dear woman, who had raised two splendid daughters, said that if the Germans approached her home, she would kill both her daughters and herself. **If the people of the United States could visualize the German invasion of Belgium, the desecration of France and the assaults upon the mothers, wives and daughters of our Allies, there would be no need for an appeal for a Liberty Loan, because our people would voluntarily make a 'liberty gift' to crush Prussian Militarism and make the world safe.**

"Mr. Daniel Willard, President Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, recently had a splendid article appear in the press. The thought that was uppermost in his mind was this: 'Before any American spends money for new materials, or starts on a new program, let him ask himself this question—will this help America win the war?' This thought was most timely because the American railroads for years have been hammered between the 'upper and the lower stone,' with increased cost of operation, with decreased rates for performing service, so that they are not in that pink of perfection that transportation lines should be in a glorious country such as we have.

"Before we get through the war, we will have meatless days and wheatless days and the American people should respond promptly to this, because such a program will help that splendid man Hoover in his conservation work. Some of our people do not seem to understand that Hoover's thought is not to economize for the sake of saving money, but to save the food, to prevent starving in Europe. He is constantly urging the reduced consumption of beef, pork, dairy products, wheat and sugar, all so necessary for the up-keep of our Allies in Europe.

#### DAYLIGHT-SAVING NEEDED

"A law should be enacted forcing the daylight saving hour, if only to conserve our coal supply, because coal is so badly needed in Europe. In Paris, when we left, coal was selling at \$45.00 per ton, with very little chance of getting a full ton. The surplus coal in the United States should be used as dunnage on all shipments to Europe.

"Shortly after the declaration of war, six railroad Presidents in the United States were appointed a special Committee of National Defense of the American Railway Association. These men very ably supervise all of the transportation lines so that our 250,000 miles of railroad are now being operated as one great system, and mark you, without a Government guarantee of any kind. In England, Sir Guy Ganett is the Dictator in charge of all the lines, but they very wisely guaranteed the earnings of the railroads so that there will be a surplus accruing

equal to that which the English roads enjoyed the year previous to the war. In France, Minister Claveille is the Dictator of the railroads and they are either Government owned or the profits guaranteed.

"In France, to economize in train service and force the people to stay at home, 60% of the passenger service has been discontinued, although the passenger rates have not been increased since the war. In England the tariffs were increased 50% and this automatically decreased the passenger train mileage 40%. All the countries at war are trying to impress the people with the fact that they should remain at home and not travel, leaving the transportation lines free to take care of the war program. In the United States at the present time less than 10% of the passenger train mileage has been taken off since the war began. We must educate ourselves to less transportation service in this wonderful country than we have enjoyed in the past.

"There is no passenger car shortage in England or France because the soldiers ride in freight cars, the standard military train consisting of the engine, next car a gondola loaded with coal, next car a box car with bunks for the relief crew (every train carries two crews). Then there are 17 flat cars, 30 box cars, 2 baggage cars and 1 coach for the officers.

"The French people are tired; very tired. They have had three years of most cruel war, over a million of their men have been killed, and there is no smiling in France at the present time, except by the German and Austrian prisoners. The only thing that France can give to America is water, air and standing timber.

"According to the press reports, there will be no gasoline in England for pleasure parties after November 1st. It was my pleasure to have three conferences with General Pershing, and I state most emphatically that General Pershing is absolutely the right man in the right place. Recently, in Washington, I took luncheon with a man who had served with General Pershing in the Philippines. This man is whipping into line a company of special men who will shortly go to France. He told me that, in the Philippines, and wherever General Pershing served, the officers, to a man, would take their Company, if need be, to hell with General Pershing.

#### **SUBMARINE MENACE IS REAL**

"The submarines are a real menace. When we were abroad approximately 250,000 net tons of shipping were being lost per month and it was reported the new German submarines carried 18 torpedoes, and had a cruising radius of 21 days. The only good feature was that the average life of the submarine was but 4 trips. We returned from France on the Steamer 'Espagne' from Bordeaux and aboard ship was what was left of two entire ship crews that had been sunk by torpedoes a few days previous.

"Let me give you this study: To feed an army of one-half million men with their horses and guns, will require 3 ships per day from the United States to France, or one ship every 8 hours. For one million, it would require a ship every 4 hours, and for two million a ship every 2 hours and every one of these ships must run the blockade and get through safely. In addition to this tremendous fleet, we must have ships to take care of engines, cars, rails, bridges, machinery and all other equipment that our Army must have in France.

"When we were in France, a French officer told us that the Army thought very well of the Crown Prince of Germany and, as he explained, this was because of the Crown Prince's interference with the German Army which had made it possible for the French to win several battles which they might not have won if Von Hindenberg had been in charge and not the Crown Prince. God grant we have no Crown Princes in the United States at this time, especially at Washington.

"The American people have much to learn from the German military thoroughness. The State Department is giving us each week some documentary evidence that it has accumulated. We were given some side lights of the Prussian military thoroughness while in France. We were told of the intrigue in Russia told without doubt the Russian troops would have been into Vienna in six weeks' time had not the Petrograd damnableness resulted in the shutting off of munitions, then of food stuffs. Later there was the insurrection in Russia and the theorists announced that the property of the rich was to be divided. The anxiety of the soldiers who had fought in the trenches to enjoy some of the good things that were to be distributed resulted in two million men going back home.

"General Petain told us that, when war was declared, they had figured the German population as 65 million, but now they were absolutely satisfied that for years the census had been 'faked' and there were one hundred million people in Germany. We had reliable data that approximately 7000 locomotives had been made in Germany during the three years of the war. Germany is the great manufacturing country and we all know that Germany should, on this account, have had more freight cars with shipments in France at any time than the French had in Germany. To emphasize the German thoroughness, when war was finally declared, there were 55,000 French cars in Germany and 17,000 German cars in France - result, Germany was ahead 38,000 cars.

"After relating some of my experiences in France, I am charged with being a pessimist. I had always claimed to be an optimist but the American people should know the truth. Any man visiting Europe today will return a sadder man.

### **Men, Money and Americanitis Will Win**

"Will we win the war? Yes. In the Philadelphia papers recently Lord Northcliffe was recorded as stating the war would be won by money. In the same paper, in another column, that splendid man General Kuhn said the war would be won by men and guns. It is my thought that we will win with both money and properly equipped men, plus the help of every American man, woman and child, after an injection of 100% AMERICANITIS has been shot into them by men of your kind.

"How long will the war last? No one knows, but our Government has very wisely worked on a program of a long war. Consider the bigness of this war. Money by the billions; men by the millions, ships, cars and aeroplanes by the thousands. Mr. W. W. Atterbury, who has recently gone to France as Director-General of Transportation, must have the biggest supply yard in the world - this because of the wonderful things that we are expected to do, and the further fact that there are 3000 miles between France and the United States by sea and the submarine menace is a real one. Besides, we must always have sufficient material on hand to follow up the retreating Germans.



"In conclusion, after traveling approximately 4000 mi roads and about 1000 miles by automobiles, principally i covering the harbors and rivers in tugs and motor boats, a that never can be blotted from memory, my message to the American people who stay at home is:

**"Economize, don't waste. Be an American, first, last and all the time. Let your criticism be constructive and not destructive. Stand behind the Government.**

"To our men and true women who go abroad to help win the war, good luck and God bless them."

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